1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

dark brown or black. I took no measurements, for such behaviour would have been too disconcerting, but I calculate that the mean height for men is about 68 inches, the women being three or four inches shorter. The people are solidly and rather squarely built, with, like most mountain races, very strongly developed calves and leg muscles. The men, with the exception of the lamas, wear their hair in a long plait reaching down to the waist; the women also plait or braid their hair. Although the dresses of the two sexes differ in detail both wear skirt-like garments down to the knees with the legs and feet bare, and it is often extremely difficult to guess a person's sex when seen from behind. Very few Lepcha men have any facial hair, and when I have shown my photographs to friends there have usually been a great number of mistakes in the sex of the subjects.

V

The first two stages of the road from Gangtok to Tibet are Dikchu and Singhik. The mule-road follows the left bank of the Teesta river; a little before Dikchu on the right bank starts the reserve of Zongu. About a mile before Singhik there is a tiny settlement called Mangan; it is situated about a thousand feet above the river. Mangan is a halting-place for muleteers going to and from Tibet; it is a small bazaar and contains the only stores within a radius of about twenty miles. There are half-a-dozen stores with a cheap stock of mixed goods; they are owned by members of the Indian Mahawari caste; their dealings with the Lepchas will be described later. There is also there a government-trained dispenser, a postmaster (the post from Gangtok is brought out twice weekly, on which days the post-office is open), an elementary schoolmaster, all these three government officials, a couple of Tibetan prostitutes for the use of the muleteers, and some liquor shops where the native commercial spirit, *arak*, can be bought. There are perhaps thirty houses.

Branching off from the main mule road on the left is a narrow and extremely precipitous path which descends to the Teesta; at this place the river is crossed by a plank bridge with steel supports; this has recently replaced the fragile and giddy-looking Lepcha bridge made entirely of bamboo, and represents the only permanent link between Zongu and the rest of Sikkim. For a little while the path on the other side skirts the river, passing on its way a substantial wooden shed which has been erected to receive the

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

cardamum fruit[10] at the time of harvest, and which some Lepchas hope will be converted into an elementary school. A little after this the track shoots sharply upwards, barely indicated by the presence of rocks and felled trees, running through poor and ragged stony ground sparsely sown with maize. The path leads directly to the crest of the hill which is surmounted by a small stone cairn or *choten*, perhaps three thousand feet above the river and five thousand above the sea-level. This cairn is almost opposite the junction of the Teesta and Talung rivers, and from it paths wander west and south, to the different villages of Zongu.

Proceeding westward from the cairn you reach in a couple of miles the small village of Panung; a couple more miles and you come to the village of Lingthem. Without our knowledge—we were only making for Zongu, and until the last hours believed that was the name of a village—it had been arranged that we were to stop there, and the first storey of the monastery had been placed at our disposal, in such a manner that it was almost impossible to refuse. As a place to live in the monastery suffered from several disadvantages; it was extremely cold and draughty, and fires were forbidden because the smoke would defile the images of the Gods; smoking was forbidden, except on the balcony which for my special benefit was temporarily considered outside holy precincts; the place was overrun with rats, which it would have been the greatest possible sin to kill in the monastery, and which could not be driven away supernaturally because none of the lamas knew the correct ritual, which involves the use of sand, ashes, and paper charms; there was never any privacy for at any time people might feel impelled to come to worship the images which were housed in this upper chamber, and regularly at dawn and sunset a young lama came to arrange the altars; and during big monastery feasts sleep was often impossible for two or three nights. But some of these disadvantages had compensating advantages; and as the focal centre of Lingthem, and to a lesser degree of the whole Talung side of Zongu, our living quarters were ideally situated for constant observation.

[10] Cardamum is the money crop of the Lepchas. Cardamum is a spice consisting of the seed-capsules of the perennial plants of a species of *Amomum* and is much used as a stomachic and condiment.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

of a deeper yellow-green where the cardamum grows. Scattered here and there among the prevailing greens may be seen the glow of a fruit-tree in flower, and nearby the low thatched roof of a house, barely distinguishable until you are close upon it. The paths are the faintest tracks, invisible until you come upon them; there is no main road, nothing to guide your way; except that there are usually more stones—for the bigger stones will have been removed from the neighbouring fields and piled on the path to make drier walking in the wet weather—there is little to indicate what is path and what merely rough ground. Overtowering and dwarfing all the works of man are the enormous ramparts of the gleaming snows, cutting short a quarter of the horizon in almost every direction. You can see that the land is in part cultivated and inhabited, but the part seems insignificant; in the battle between man and nature, nature seems everywhere the winner.

That is the landscape for the European; for the Lepcha not a single feature is the same. Except when they refer to them as the habitations of the high Gods, the Lepchas do not remember the mountains; they do not lift up their eyes, they look down on the ground. Every piece of land is meaningful for them, for every piece, unless it be the home of a supernatural, is, has been, or will be cultivated. They think and speak of their country as a poor country, demanding disproportionate labour for the food they require for themselves and their families. For them the land is not a friend; it is a material; and when they look at it they see therein the work and sweat they have fed it with all their lives. Every piece of land, every step they take, reminds them of the past and the present, of their own work and struggles, and those of their neighbours; the houses and fences they have helped to build, the land they have helped to clear and weed and harvest, the places where they have played as children, or, later, met for amorous encounter. They see too the cliffs and rocks and lonely trees where dwell the devils who menace and destroy their otherwise peaceful and happy existence; these visible signs remind them of those evil forces—disease and death, blight and famine, childlessness and enmity and quarrelling—that mar a life which, though hard enough, would otherwise be easy and friendly, full of health and happiness. The Lepchas do not see the landscape; they see the records of their lives, and of the lives of their ancestors, and of the lives to come of their children.

[p. 82 is blank]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

000 "The Congress, which has refused office in six provinces where the party is in a position to form Ministries, observed a *hartal* to mark the inauguration of autonomy in the provinces.

"The *hartal* was observed in Calcutta by the closing of Hindu shops. A small minority of Moslem-owned shops were also closed.

"Public services continued as usual, but schools and offices under the control of the Calcutta Corporation were closed. No disturbances have been reported."

* * * * *

782 At almost the very moment when the Governor of Bengal
787 was administering the oath to his newly-appointed Ministers,
789 an old Lepcha woman was squatting on the ground in a remote valley in Sikkim, with an egg pressed against her forehead. This was the day of the *Cherim* ceremony, which is observed all over Sikkim twice in every year: once now, and again at the beginning of the winter. Its purpose is to find out what sickness is likely to trouble the village during the next few months and, since the Lepchas like to get as much benefit as possible out of any one celebration, also to keep
[387] away hail. Kahlyeu, a gentle old man of nearly eighty, had
[133] previously made a rough altar of the branches of trees. It
[437] faced up the valley in full sight of Kinchinjunga, the summit of which is only twenty miles away as the crow flies, but for
[137] poor toiling man a journey of many painful days along the roughest of paths, and through thick rhododendron forest, to
787 the lower slopes alone. On his roughly constructed altar
789 Kahlyeu now put a large brass tray in which were seven
778 cones of butter, four eggs (some said it should have been
782 three), one rupee, three small butter-lamps and a Tibetan
[285] ceremonial scarf. The tray was placed on top of a plaited
[415] bamboo winnowing-tray, on which was spread a piece of red cotton cloth. All this was an offering to the spirits who dwell
[776] in the mountain, which the local people know only as Konchen. Before the eggs were placed in position Pom-ri, the old woman who was making the offering, placed each in

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

presents could not possibly have arrived at a less inconvenient moment. We eventually left about ten o'clock, in pouring rain, and to the accompaniment of the monastery band, which went with us for about a quarter of a mile. Tafoor told me not to worry about the weather: he has set everything out and it will certainly be fine to-morrow.

We reached Lungdeum in a couple of hours, after which the path degenerated into the very roughest of tracks through the forest, climbing up and down a great deal. In a number of places the hillsides were too steep for an ordinary path, and here and there narrow lengths of sliced bamboo had been fastened across the cliff face. These are easily negotiable in dry weather by anyone walking barefoot; but a real death-trap when wet to anyone wearing nailed boots, as a false step is liable to precipitate one at least twenty or thirty feet down the hillside, and may even have more serious consequences. The Lepchas laughed at my extremely clumsy efforts to retain my balance. Rubber-soled shoes are the best type of footgear for this sort of work; but in wet weather they merely add to one's difficulties. For anyone who is unaccustomed to walk barefoot it would probably be best to wear a couple of pairs of thick socks or stockings and discard one's boots; they do at least give a good grip on the slippery bamboo planks.

By four o'clock we had dropped down to the river, which had to be crossed before the final climb up to the camping site at the entrance to the narrow valley that leads up to the monastery. Most of the coolies, who had left Lingtem a long time before me, were waiting on the other side, perhaps in order to have a good laugh at me crossing the bridge. I must confess that I find these Lepcha bridges most terrifying. They are made of heavy strands of cane, joined together and anchored to huge trees on either side of the river. The two main strands also serve as a handrail, and from them smaller canes are suspended at intervals so as to form a series of U-shaped loops. Into these loops long lengths of sliced bamboo are placed end to end. These form the actual

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

swollen so much from the leech-bites that I could not get my boots on. It was such a relief to walk on a proper path again that the eighteen miles into Gangtok passed in a flash, and I did not even notice the unevenness of the cobbled path, which on other occasions has seemed so tiring. We reached the bungalow at half-past five, only to find it filled with tourists from Darjeeling. However, the custodian fixed me up in a small shack normally reserved for Tibetan travellers, where I gratefully tore the stockings off my bleeding legs. Leech-bites are not painful; but after the first day they itch in a most intolerable manner.

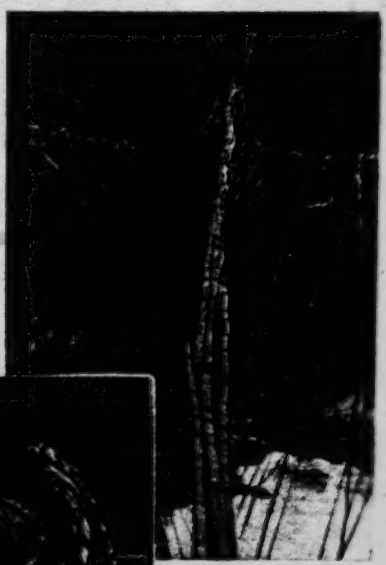
I was feeling tired and hungry, and not in the best of moods, when one of those desiccated spinsters with a passion for animals, a type peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon race, descended upon me. I produced my politest smile, in the hope that she might at least offer me a cup of tea; but it was not for this that she had come: "Did I know if it was true," she said, "that the Everest Expeditions had slept in this bungalow on their way to Tibet? It would be thrilling to think that one was actually occupying the same bungalow, would it not?" I winked at the bungalow guardian, an old friend, who knew sufficient English to follow the conversation, but before I could think of a suitably fatuous answer she had rattled on again: "I wonder if you could tell me," she said, "what it would cost for me to send my cage of parrots from Calcutta to Bombay?" Fortunately, the arrival of my baggage saved me from further encounters.

6th June, 1937:

Left Gangtok by car in pouring rain at half-past four and arrived at the Odlings' house in Kalimpong just as they were sitting down to dinner; and at once became conscious of my travel-stained appearance. Freddy Chapman, just back from climbing Chomolhari, also there *en route* to England. There is undoubtedly something to be said in favour of polished tables, good food, gleaming

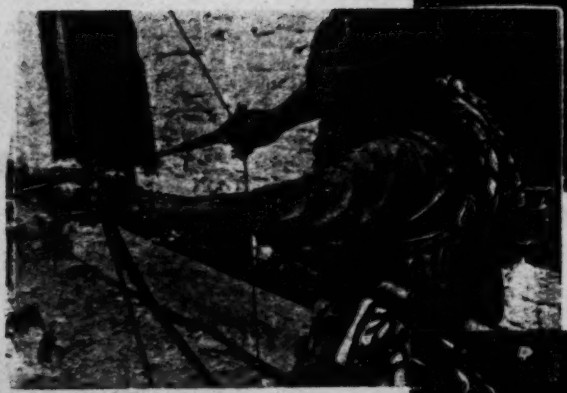
2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

491



A Lepcha bridge.

411
291
142



Karma demonstrating the method of using a bow and arrow.

487

"Road" in the upper Talung Valley.

[Facing p. 298]